

## [John Robinson]

1

Tales - Life history [?] [7?]

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Page #1

FC 240

John Robinson ,77, living at Fort Worth, Texas, R.R. 2, was born April 7, 1861, at Waxahachie, Ellis co., Texas. His father, Captain William Robinson, farmed a small tract of land and raised cattle which grazed on the open range. William Robinson enlisted in the Confederate Army at the commencement of the Civil War, and served as a Captain throughout the duration of the Civil War. A short period after Captain Robinson was mustered out of the Army, he moved to Fannin co., 10 miles [?] of Bonham. There he engaged in ranching. John Robinson worked on his father's ranch, beginning at the of seven years. When at the age of 13, he and an older brother drove a herd of their father's cattle, to Hamilton co., and located a cow-camp near Cranfills Gap in Hamilton co. At the age of [?] he entered the Government secret service department. He carries [wound?] scars, received in gun fights with desperadoes. He continued in the service four years and then engaged in farming for a livelihood.

His story of [?] life follows:

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"I am 77 years old and have made Texas my home throughout my life time. My place of birth was at [Waxahachie?], Ellis co., Texas, April 7, 1861.

"My father was Captain William Robinson. Prior to the Civil War, he farmed for a livelihood. When the Civil War started, father enlisted in the Confederate Army and served as Captain for the duration of the War. He received a wound in his left leg which prevented/ him from doing heavy farm work. Therefore, after the war he changed his occupation. He moved his family to Fannin co., shortly after he returned from serving in the Army, and established a cattle ranch.

"Where we were located in Ellis co., it was a wooded country. In those days all settlers were located in a wooded country or a river bottom. C12 - [???] 2 Folks didn't think a family could live on the prairie land, because of inability to secure water.

"When father announced that he was going to move to Fannin co., and locate on the prairie land for the purpose of establishing a cattle ranch, folks pronounced the move as foolish. Because, as they thought, he would not be able to find water for his family's supply.

"Father, never-the-less, moved and succeeded in putting down a well to water and secured a sufficient supply for all our family's needs and for our domestic stock. This well was the first well dug in the prairie section of Fannin co., and disproved the, then prevailing, idea that water could not be obtained there.

"Father bought 1000 acres of land for the price of 75¢ per acre, and again, father was said to have exercised poor judgment by paying such price for land. On this land abundance of native grass grew, and that was what father desired for cattle grazing land. He located our home and headquarters about six miles S. of the Red River and grazed his cattle between our headquarters and the river. He used the river for his cattle's water supply.

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"Father registered 'R' on the right shoulder as his brand and began to gather a herd. He bought cattle, the Texas Longhorn, at the low price which prevailed the first couple of years following the close of the Civil War. Of course, the range was free and open, and there were many unbranded cattle roaming the range. These past the yearling age came to be referred to as Mavericks. Many Mavericks were found by them who hunted for the critters.

"When I was seven years old, father had by that/ time gathered about 3 7000 head by means of purchasing and picking up strays without brands. He sold a few occasionally, but up to this time, he was not anxious to sell, because he anticipated better prices.

At the age of seven, I was able to assist and rode the range doing such work as I was able to perform. My brother, Jack, then 14 years old, my father and three hired cowhands did the necessary work attending to our herd. It was necessary for one hand to watch for injured critters, and for bogged cattle in the river bottom. This work was assigned to me. In the river bottom, there were numerous places where bog holes of quick-sand were located. Critters would walk into these holes frequently, and become bogged. If they were not hauled out, the animals would die. / Even, if I was just a slip of a lad, I could attend to the bogged critters, because the hoss did the pulling. All I had to do was place the loop over the critter's horns, and with the lasso tied to the saddle's nub, the hoss did the rest.

"Some times the critter would be so weakened, by its stay in the [?] it would be unable to stand. In this case I would put some feed before the animal and leave it. After eating and resting for a spell, the critter would get up and return to the herd. Aslo, I watched for [sores?] and conditions of such nature.

"The other waddies attended to the other necessary work, which was holding the herd in the range section we wanted them to graze on. The animals, of their own will, would graze in the vicinity of the water and salt licks, if the grass was sufficient. They would always return to their [begining?] ground each night, unless driven off 4 due to some cause, such

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as lack of grass, fear of a storm and which were the three conditions we had to watch for. A storm would cause the animals to drift hunting for shelter and they would go many miles from their home range if not held back.

“Our range was all a prairie region, so did not have any [shelter?] for the critters during a storm. Prior to a severe storm, and during its progress, we were compelled to put every waddie riding to hold the herd from drifting in the lee way of the storm. If any part of the herd got out of control and drifted away, the animals would remain at some place where they could find water or would finally finally contact some other herd and mix with it. Those days herds grazed in many sections of the country, and if a herd strayed off it generally would be found mixed with some other herd. If this herd belonged to some honest rancher the strayed cattle would be turned back to their owner. In the event the strayed herd mixed with some rustler, rustler's / herd, and there were a few of the breed, a part or the whole herd would be lost.

“Those cattle which strayed and were not located immediately, if not in the hands of a thief, would be located during the following general roundup. What we called the general roundup, was held each Spring and Fall. The crews of those ranches in the immediate vicinity worked together under an appointed roundup boss. The ranchers from distant sections sent one or two 'reps' (representatives) to work in the roundup of the various regions. The reps job was to watch for his ranch' brand and drift any of the brand back to their home ranch.

“Through the co-operation of the ranchers, the cattle were kept accounted for and each rancher, to a great extent, knew he would get what critters belonging to him. Co-Operation, also, enabled the ranchers to combat the thieves.

“Under the conditions we raised cattle those days, it was a difficult problem to keep a sufficient watch to prevent rustling. With a herd of several thousand, the cattle would be scattered over a vast section, and the herd would be split up in bunches here and there.

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The rustler could watch for a separated bunch and drift the animals away. When this happened the rancher would not likely know of the steal. Because of this condition, when a rancher saw a number of cattle being drifted through his territory, he would note the brand. If the drover was unknown to him, he would ride to the owner of the brand and report the fact. If no sale had been made, then a party of ranchers would form and trail the rustler. There were many rustlers caught during one period of time, but their depredations was stopped, after the ranchers took the matter of dealing with the thieves in their own hands.

“For a time the ranchers would report the thievery and thief to the sheriff, but conditions reached a point where it seemed the officials could not cope with the situation. Either, they could not catch the thief or if they did a sufficient case could not be made against the defendant. In a majority of the trials the defendant was exonerated.

“In our section there lived a Dyer family, in which were three sons, and this family, especially the three boys, cause the ranchers a great amount of trouble. Each of the boys were tried for stealing, horses and cattle, several times, but were found not guilty each time. One of the boys was even acquitted on a murder charge.

“A rancher named [Buchanan?] was deputized by the sheriff to arrest Dyer on a charge for stealing cattle. Buchanan went to the Dyer home alone, which was a negligent act, and was killed while there. There was no eye witness of the shooting, except members of the defendant's family. At the trial there was no evidence to / controvert testimony of the family members which was to the effect that the shooting was done in self defense. Therefore, Dyer was acquitted.

“So, after a period during which the [rustlers?], by one means or another, escaped punishment through criminal court procedure, the ranchers attended to passing judgment and [?] out punishment. Thereafter, when a rustlers were reported as stealing some cattle, a party of ranchers would trail the thieves. If the herd was retaken, which was often the case, the report would be, the cattle were retaken, but the rustlers escaped.” However, a

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few days later some one would report to the sheriff that he discovered a man hanged to a tree. Generally the party would state he was attracted to the spot by seeing buzzards circling constantly over the location.

“Two of the Dyer boys were found hanging to a tree at the end of a rope.

“The committee of ranchers would hold a trial and allow the prisoner a chance to defend himself. Of [?????] [??] for him to offer. If the accused had been trailed 7 and caught after he had left the herd, when he discovered trailers closing in on him, then the prisoner would generally offer a defense.

“One of the committee would sit as judge and conduct the hearing. My father, Captain Robinson, sat as judge in several of these trials. I was too young to take any part in the proceedings, but looked in on the scene a number of times. Seveeeal Several of the scenes which took place at these hearings are still a vivid picture in my mind. I shall try and describe some of the things I recall.

“The prisoner would always stand, unarmed and with his hands tied behind his back. The judge would call for statements by them present to support the complaint. Generally them who had their cattle stolen would relate what they knew about the stealing and the accused connection with it. At the conclusion of each statement the prisoner would be allowed to question the speaker. When all the complaining witness had made their statements, then the prisoner would be allowed to present his defense. If his statement created any doubt and needed investigation to verify, the investigation would be made immediately, by some one who would ride to check on the statement. When every one who wished to had made their talks and all necessary investigations were completed, a vote would be taken. The result of the majority vote would determine the punishment.

“At times there would be considerable arguments by the members relating to [?] what the punishment should be. Some times the committee would vote to acquit, some times they would withhold final action on condition the accused would leave the country immediately

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and some times the verdict would to hang the prisoner. 8 "When the verdict called for the man to be hanged, the execution was done on the spot. The place where these trials were always held was in some wooded [?]. The Red River bottom was the place where the trials in our section were usually held.

"The execution was performed by placing the condemned person on a hoss with his hands tied behind his back. With a noose around his neck and the other end of the rope looped over a limb of a tree, the hoss was driven off and this act would leave the man suspended in the air. When the condemned person left the hoss, he would drop a foot or so and meet a jerk with the tauting of the rope. This sudden jerk would render the party semi or wholly unconscious, but there would follow struggling and writhing of the body, then the violent effort would cease gradually till a quiver and a jerk ended the movement and limpness settled over the body. This scene would last about five minutes. After the body hung limp, the members would ride away.

"The attitude of the condemned men varied greatly. Some of them pleaded for their lives and prayed. Some cussed and cursed every one and everything for the start to the finish. While others went limp and has to be carried and seated on the hoss, and some stood with a defiant stolid countenance, and would not utter a word. One of the Dyer boys presented a defiant attitude, and one of them cursed till the jerk of the rope stopped his speaking.

"After it was reported that the two Dyer boys were found hanged to a limb, the rustlers shyed away from our territory. 9 "Some of the ranchers in the Fannin co., territory were troubled with Indians molesting their herds to secure beef. The Indians would stampede a herd by driving into it suddenly and thus scaring the herd. Their object was to gather the strays for meat supply. We were not molested, however, because father and us boys treated [??] the Indians with kindness. We did not allow our actions to indicate that we were above them, and had superior rights. Also, we would occasionally give a beef to them. By following this system in dealing with the Indians, they became our friends. Anyone of us could obtain any favor from them it was possible for them to grant.

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"When I was 13 years of age, my brother, then 27, and I took 3500 head of cattle to Hamilton co., and established a cow-camp there. We bought additional stock and ranged about [5000?] head.

"We located our camp near Cranfill [?] Gap, which is located int the Cranfill Mountain district. Our camp was 25 miles from 'One Arm' Reed's ranch. Also, the Pancake ranch was our neighbor.

"The railroads were entending into Kans., and father reckoned a pick up in cattle prices and demand and his calculations were correct.

"Assisting us boys were six rawhides which we hired for \$25. per month, and with additional help during general roundups.

"The range was open and free, and many cattle grazed there. A few settlers were located in the territory, but were in scattered communities and their fields were fenced with rail fences. All the settlers ranged more or less cattle. Their herds numbered from a few hundred to a few thousand. The [????] ranches were the [giggest?] outfits in 10 "We used a tent for our shelter, and between it and the chuckwagon we had our home. We had no regular cook. The cooking was done by the one who reached the camp first. My brother cooked the breakfast generally, while the rest of us saddled the hosses. [?] Our diet consisted of beef mainly, with beans next on the menu, then came the sour-dough bread and canned vegetables. We would have wild game occasionally, which was plentiful in those days.

"We had the rustlers troublers and fights between the thieves and the ranchers in the Hamilton co., district the [?] as we had in Fannin co., and it was handled in the same way. We were compelled to be on watch constantly to prevent [losing?] cattle.

"The Leon River supplied the water for our herd and we provided salt licks near the river. Therefore, [?] created the home range for the herd, and the place where the cattle would



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return to each night to bed down. [?], we needed only one night rider on duty at one time, / to keep watch over the herd. During the day two men were assigned to stay with the herd. The rest of the outfit attended to other work. There were always cuts to watch for and daubing of the cuts to prevent screw-worms infection. My job on the Hamilton co., ranch was looking after the bogged critters.

“The sale of our cattle was made to drovers. We generally sold to James Pettes. He made a business of buying cattle and driving herds to Kansas City and other Northern markets, after the railroad extended W. into Kansas. Our sales usually were made in the Spring and Fall. The class sold were the developed steers and cows. When a slae was made we then had to gather our herd 11 and cut out the class of critters sold. We would roundup all our cattle and the cutters cut out till the desired number was cut, then these were held separated from the other cattle until delivered. Either the drover sent a crew to drive the cattle to his concentration point or we would drive the herd to the place.

“Of course, we had the stampedes. The Texas Longhorn were always waiting for an excuse to go on a run, especially when driving / the cattle away from their home range. While on their hole home range, the Longhorn was not so prone to go on a stampede, except during a storm. During the progress of a severe storm, the danger of a stampede happening was always present. When a loud crash of thunder sounded near to the herd, or lightening struch in or near it, the critters were sure to start running. We were compeled to be very careful about making any noise. A cough made by one of the waddies, stricking a match, and other triffle noises, could startle the herd and cause the animals to go on a run.

“To give an example how easily a herd can be started on a stampede, I shall tell of an incident which happened while we were driving 400 head to be delivered to Pitte's concentration place, about 30 miles from our range. A storm set in and it was thundering lightly. The critters, as usual during a storm were freting. I started to put on my slicker and while unrolling it, a gust of wind flapped it in the air. Within a minute, the 400 critters

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were taking their best running stride towards their home range, and there is where they went in spite of our best efforts to hold them. We didn't lose any, but had the cutting job to do over. 12 "When a herd became exceedingly scared they were furious and would fight a boss. Under such condition, it was impossible for the waddies to stop the run until the critters were exhausted. Ordinarily, the Longhorn would run from a mounted man, but when scared badly one had to look out for the safety of his boss.

"I remained on the Hamilton co., ranch six years and then an opportunity was presented to me to join the Secret Service Department of the Federal Government, and I accepted the offer, I then removed the bossy stink from myself.

"I remained in the Government service four years, and during this period my duties placed me in several gun battles. I now carry visible scars made by bullets received during gun fights. The worse battle I took part in was at Kansas City in '81 or '82, when Bob Baker and his gang was subdued.

"I received word that the Baker crowd were in Kansas City. I went there to locate the gang. I took five men with me and we knew that unless we could get the drop on them, we would have to swap out in a shooting match. I called a conference at which I informed my men that we were going to meet a gang which would not hesitate to shoot, and were excellent shots. That, if we failed to get them covered before they were aware of who we were, we must be prepared to fight a gun battle. I told the boys to examine their guns to make certain as possible that their guns were in the best of shooting order. Also, I stated that if anyone felt the slightest desire to not stay on the job to make it known then and there. Not one of them indicated a desire to evade the hunt. 13 "I then instructed the boys about how to conduct themselves in the event of a fight. I told them that if shooting started to shoot to kill, to be cautious, but not to hesitate or become anxious and excited. That in the event we had the gang bunched to keep crowding in on them, and if we were not protected from their fire by some object, to keep moving from right to left, thus presenting a more difficult target.

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"We received a tip the boys had a hideout at the edge of town. We went to the designated place, starting early in the morning.

"The gang were housed in a building which was located in an open tract of land. There was no chance to sneak up on the house, and it was to this building we started intending to surround the house. But, just as we entered the open tract of land, we espied a number of men advancing towards town and us. I was certain it was Bob Baker and some of his men. They, evidently, suspected we were men coming to get them, because the moment they saw us, they stopped and went into a huddle. I spoke to my men and said:

"Boys, their men are a party of Baker's gang. Just walk along unconcerned, but don't take your eyes off of them, and listen for an order. Under these orders we proceeded. At this time the men were about 200 feet away from us. We had not walked but a few feet when we noticed each of them put their hands on their guns which were at their side. I said to my men in an under tone, 'we are in for a fight. Now keep cool and when shooting starts, spread out and remember orders. I had just finished talking when Baker said: 13 "You fellows stop where you are. I want to know who you are and what you want.' We stopped and I answered:

"We are Federal men with a warrant for Bob Baker and his partners. You ten men are under arrest. Come forward and surrender.'

'Like hell we will. You come and get us,' was the reply.

"Baker had not yet completed his statement when I gave my men orders to go into action. My men spread out about 20 feet apart in a semi-circle, and shooting started simultaneously by each party. There were 10 of them, so they had the advantage of us in numbers, but they remained clustered, while we scattered and kept up a weaving movement.

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"Shortly after shooting started one of Baker's men went down, followed by another. Then one of my men went down. By this time about every [oneoon?] each side had been scratched at least. Next another one of my men dropped and two more of Baker's men fell to the ground. This left three men fighting in my party and five in Baker's party, but one of his men was severely wounded and was not doing much. I yelled to them and asked if they were willing to surrender, but their answer was, 'no!' But, shortly after this we felled two more of their men and the remainder threw up their hands.

"When the firing stopped, there were three men left of my party, but all were wounded, to some extent. The three of Baker's men were, also, wounded and one of them died a short time afterwards.

"I am carrying a scar on my right wrist and forearm from two scratch wounds received in that battle. I have always thought since 14 that I am living now because it was not my time to go, during that gun battle.

At the conclusion of four years service in the Secret Service Department, I concluded that it would be more healthy for me to live on a farm. I quit and returned to Fannin co., and there made farming my life's vocation. I established a farm on my father's tract of land and remained there until I retired a few years ago.